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Item 76 of the preliminary list*
General and complete disarmament

Note verbale dated 22 February 1999 from the Permanent Mission of South Africa to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

The Permanent Mission of South Africa to the United Nations presents its compliments to the Secretary-General of the United Nations and has the honour to inform him that the South African Government has decided to destroy all surplus small arms in possession of the Government rather than sell them. This action is taken in accordance with the Secretary-General's report on small arms (A/52/298 of 27 August 1997), which recommended, *inter alia*, that States should exercise restraint on the transfer of surplus small arms manufactured solely for possession and use by the military and police forces. The report also recommended that all States should consider the possibility of destroying all surplus small arms.

In accordance with its policy on non-proliferation and arms control, in particular on small arms and light weapons proliferation (circulated as A/53/169/Add.3), the South African Government decided that redundant small arms in the possession of the South African Government be destroyed rather than sold on a tender basis as done previously. When destruction takes place it will be public, and media representatives will be invited.

The decision to destroy all redundant small arms underlines the South African Government's grave concern about the proliferation of small arms, which is having a devastating effect on the socio-economic development and reconstruction of civil societies in southern Africa. Such proliferation endangers the democratic pursuits which are presently being consolidated in the region. The availability of uncontrolled surplus small arms after the resolution of various armed conflicts is one of the sources of illicit small arms.

The Permanent Mission would like to suggest that the steps taken by the South African Government could serve as an example for the Secretary-General to encourage other Governments, in particular those from arms manufacturing States, to implement similar policies in pursuit of the Secretary-General's report on small arms. The Permanent Mission wishes to request that the present note, as well as the statement released at the time of the South African Government's decision to destroy all surplus small arms (see annex), be circulated as a document of the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly under item 76 of the preliminary list.

* A/54/50.

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Annex

Media statement on the decision by the National Convention Arms Control Committee on the destruction of surplus small arms

The South African Government has decided to destroy all surplus small arms rather than sell them. This was announced on 19 February 1999 by the Chairperson of the National Conventional Arms Control Committee (NCACC), Professor Kader Asmal. It follows a meeting of NCACC, at which Government Ministers expressed grave concern about the proliferation of small arms, which is having a devastating effect on the socio-economic development and reconstruction of civil societies in southern Africa. Such proliferation endangers the democratic pursuits which are presently being consolidated in the region. The availability of uncontrolled surplus small arms after the resolution of various armed conflicts is one of the sources of illicit small arms.

The United Nations Secretary-General's report on small arms of 27 August 1997 recommended, among other things, that States should exercise restraint on the transfer of surplus small arms manufactured solely for possession and use by the military and police forces. The report also recommended that all States should consider the possibility of destroying all surplus small arms.

In accordance with the Government's policy on non-proliferation and arms control, NCACC decided that redundant small arms in the possession of the South African Government should be destroyed rather than sold on a tender basis, as done previously. When destruction takes place it will be public, and media representatives will be invited. The legal and technical implications of the destruction of these small arms are presently being considered.

The South African Police Service has already begun the process of its destruction of surplus small arms. On 6 October 1997, the South African Police Service melted down 20 tons of firearms. A total of 4,504 confiscated firearms, including pistols, revolvers, rifles, shotguns and homemade firearms were also destroyed. The commercial value of these arms is estimated to be in excess of R2 million (US$ 330,000). Subsequently the South African Police Service has destroyed an additional 11 tons of confiscated ammunition and 10 tons of confiscated small arms, 9 tons of obsolete/outdated ammunition and 20 tons of redundant/obsolete small arms.

"This decision forms part of the Government's strategy to curtail the excessive and destabilizing accumulation of small arms. The magnitude of the problem is of such a nature that it can only be addressed through appropriate national, regional and international action. We have begun on a national scale in South Africa", said the NCACC Chairperson.